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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000271

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS NEW GREEK ARCHBISHOP

REF: ATHENS 179

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel V. Speckhard
for reasons 1.4 b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) On February 25, Ambassador Speckhard met with newly elected Greek Orthodox Archbishop Ieronymos II. The Archbishop told the Ambassador that coordinated efforts, discipline, and the absence of fanaticism were all necessary to achieve advances in human dignity. The Archbishop pledged his best efforts to aid immigrants, youth, drug addicts and "the desperate," and said that he wanted to strengthen relations and cooperation between Greece and the U.S. He asked the U.S. to do everything it could to assist the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul, especially regarding Halki Seminary and seized church properties. He deferred to the Ecumenical Patriarch (whom he called the first priority of the Church of Greece) when it comes to improving relations with the Catholic Church (and other Christian Churches) and hinted that he has reforms in mind for the Church of Greece. End Summary.

2. (C) In a warm and friendly first meeting with the Ambassador, newly elected Archbishop of Athens and All Greece His Beatitude Ieronymos II said that he wanted to strengthen relations and cooperation between Greece and the U.S. During difficult times, he said, coordinated efforts and discipline were required (in the absence of fanaticism) to achieve advances in human dignity. Ieronymos said the mission of the Church was to express the will of the people without discrimination and pledged to do his best to address the many needs faced by the rising number of immigrants to Greece. The Archbishop, elected on February 7 (reftel), expressed his deep thanks to the Ambassador for his personal offer of support (and that of three million Greek-Americans). Ieronymos commented how pleased he was that all of his family in the U.S. had called to congratulate him, and that the first such phone call he received was from his uncle in Utah, followed by many Greek Americans who originally hailed from Thebes, the seat of his former see.

WORDS INTO ACTIONS

3. (C) Asked by the Ambassador about his well-known charitable works, the Archbishop responded "now we are only making speeches, but soon we intend to turn words into actions." He expressed his personal desire to bring youth and immigrants, along with the poor, drug addicts and the desperate into the Church. "We are all part of one family," His Beatitude remarked.

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH: OUR PRIORITY

4. (C) Ambassador also offered continued U.S. support in

promoting the religious freedom of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and in seeking the re-opening of the Halki Seminary there. Ieronymos responded that the "first priority" of the Church of Greece was the Ecumenical Patriarch -- the Mother Church. He thanked the Ambassador and asked that the U.S. help "as much as you can," in particular with Halki and the return of Church properties seized over the years by the Government of Turkey.

A NEED FOR BALANCE

15. (C) When asked for his views on reaching out to Roman Catholic and other Christian churches, Ieronymos, with characteristic humility, saw the Church of Greece as playing a secondary role. "We will allow the Ecumenical Patriarch to have priority on this issue and we will follow his steps." The Archbishop described the sadness that attends the divisions within Christianity as being like a family where the members do not have a relationship with each other. "We must consider our eternal position and we must have balance," he offered.

16. (C) Finally, Ambassador asked Ieronymos to comment on the health of the Greek Orthodox Church. The people, the Archbishop said, are willing to do their best when they know that they are loved and understood. As the Metropolitan of Thebes, he said, it was his goal to do precisely that -- and he intends to do so as well now for all of Greece. "When you love the Greek people," he offered, "you can see their internal power" and help them to achieve great things. He said that to do this, he intended to ask the Holy Synod to undertake some reforms within the Church of Greece -- administratively and in the "behavior of the Church and the

ATHENS 00000271 002 OF 002

people on basic issues." Expressing his "reserved optimism," he promised to "make all efforts" to work with the people towards these ends, but did not elaborate on the reforms being contemplated.

COMMENT

17. (C) During the thirty minute meeting, both Ambassador and Archbishop Ieronymos steered clear of overtly political questions, views or statements. At the end of the meeting, (in which the Archbishop was not joined by anyone from his own staff) Ieronymos made a comment that the government should assist young people by developing ways to combat unemployment. This was certainly not taken as branching out into political waters, however, as much as it was a suggestion of one way to assist the youth of Greece. From this first meeting, it appears that His Beatitude does, in fact, intend to set a new course from that of his predecessor and to eschew the bully pulpit that the now deceased Archbishop Christodoulos made famous. (BIO NOTE: At the outset of the meeting, Ambassador and the Archbishop exchanged greetings in German, before continuing in their native languages. The Archbishop appears to neither speak nor understand much English. End note.)
SPECKHARD